

**PROVOCĂRI PENTRU ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL SUPERIOR DIN SECOLUL  
XXI.**

**ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNTUL ACTIV - O POSIBILITATE DE A CREȘTE  
ÎMPPLICAREA STUDENȚILOR ÎN PROCESUL DE ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNT**

**CHALLENGES FACING THE 21ST CENTURY HIGHER EDUCATION.  
ACTIVE LEARNING – A POSSIBILITY TO ENHANCE THE  
STUDENTS’ COMMITMENT TO LEARNING PROCESS**

**Associate Professor, Maria-Camelia DICU**  
“Constantin Brancusi” University in Targu Jiu

**Student, III year, Manuel DICU**  
Business Faculty, “Babes Bolyai” University in Cluj Napoca

**Abstract**

*IT IS AMAZING TO WITNESS THE RAPID CHANGES THAT EUROPE FACES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY. THE CHANGES OCCUR IN EVERY DOMAIN AND THEY ARE WIDE-RANGING. ECONOMICALLY, FINANCIALLY, TECHNOLOGICALLY, DEMOGRAPHICALLY, FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE TRANSPORTATION, OF INDUSTRY, OF REGIONAL LANDSCAPE, EUROPE IS UNDER PROFOUND TRANSFORMATIONS. THESE PROFOUND CHANGES TAKE PLACE IN THE WHOLE WORLD. GIVEN THESE CHANGES IN ALL THE DOMAINS, THE WORK PLACE ITSELF IS FAST CHANGING. THE STANDARDS OF LIVING ITSELF ARE UNDER CONTINUOUS MODIFICATIONS. SUCH CHANGES BRING WITH THEM MANY NOVELTIES. CONSIDERING ALL THESE CHANGES, THE EDUCATION IS THE ALL-IMPORTANT FACTOR THAT CANNOT REMAIN THE SAME. ALL THE ABOVE-MENTIONED CHANGES REPRESENT CHALLENGES FOR THE EDUCATION AT LARGE AND FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION IN PARTICULAR. IN THE LIGHT OF THE HIGHLY GLOBALIZED, HIGHLY TECHNOLOGIZED WORLD AND IMPLICITLY EUROPE. IN THIS ENVIRONMENT WHERE THE KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION IMPLICITLY, REPRESENT THE POWER. THE PRESENT ARTICLE AIMS TO FOCUS ON THE CHALLENGES THE HIGHER EDUCATION FACES, AS PRESENTED IN THE FIRST EUROPEAN FORUM ON TEACHING AND LEARNING AND AT THE SAME TIME TO PRESENT A POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO MOTIVATE BOTH THE STUDENTS IN THE PROCESS OF LEARNING AND THE TEACHERS IN THE PROCESS OF TEACHING.*

**Key words:** CHALLENGE, TO FACE, TO MEET, ACTIVE LEARNING, TEACHING & LEARNING

**I. Introduction**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is obvious the fact that Europe faces important challenges. The challenges we refer to comprise all the domains of life. There are economic challenges, financial challenges, demographic challenges, transportation challenges, industrial challenges, regional landscape challenges, let alone the climate challenges.

Under these circumstances, the Higher Education Institutions face challenges triggered upon by the above overall challenges. Therefore, the Higher Education Institutions have to respond to these challenges and find solutions to better train the future citizens of European Union.

The First Forum on Teaching & Learning exposed some of the challenges, yet, at the same time, the participants suggested solutions. Our paper, thus, deals with the challenges facing the Higher Education Institutions, examines the first plenary speakers' suggestions and propose, in the case of the teacher as a leader, the active learning approach, as a possibility to enhance the students' commitment towards the teaching & learning processes. Some edifying examples are presented in order to underline the all-important change in teaching methodology.

## II. Challenges

In the period 28-29 September 2017, in Paris, the First Forum on Learning and Teaching gathered presidents of universities of the EU member states. The University *Pierre e Marie Curie* hosted the academic gathering. The theme of the conference was *Meeting Challenges Together* and carried out in four Plenary Sessions apart from every day parallel sessions. The vice-president of University in Bucharest represented Romania at this all-important forum. We will deal with the Plenary Session I of the forum, which set the tone of the conference, that of searching and looking for solutions to enhance the quality of both teaching and learning.

The speakers of the Plenary Session I were Jean Chambaz, member of the EUA, European University Association, board member and Chair of the L&T Forum Steering Committee and President of the *Pierre and Marie Curie* University in Paris, France. The second speaker in the I Plenary Session was Sarah Linch, Head of Sector Higher Education in Directorate – General Education, Youth, Sports and Culture, European Commission.

The president of *Pierre and Marie Curie* University in Paris, Jean Chambaz talked about the general theme itself, *Meeting Challenges Together*. In this sense, Jean Chambaz suggested to the audience to increase attention on L&T, to identify the strategies of universities for developing L&T, the modernization of EU and a new agenda, governmental pressure often connected to cutting funds. He also drew attention on the fact that he forum itself represented EUA initiative to support, exchange of new practices and new ideas in L&T, Pan-European university collaboration and above all an European dialogue to establish the of the European Higher Education, 20 years after the Bologna Process.

While Jean Chambaz spoke about putting the challenges in front of Higher Education together, Sarah Linch set the challenges in a wider political context. Her presentation, *Policy on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* discussed the Commission White Paper on the future of Europe, which took place on 25 March 2017, in Rome. The head of the High Education sector discussed the White Paper regarding the future of Europe under the profound economic and societal changes brought by the recession in USA. Under these circumstances, the younger generation is acutely challenged under the premise that it might be less well off than their parents. On the other hand, the head of the HE sector presented the scenarios envisaged by the White Paper in Rome, for the 27 member states of EU. The first scenario put that the member states carry on together on the way of a common policy. The second envisaged a single market for the 27 member states. The third pointed that those who wanted more should do more in accomplishing the European desiderata. The fourth referred to doing less by the member states, yet more efficiently. While the fifth scenario envisaged to carry on more action together.

Jean Chambaz stated that the challenges in front of the Higher Education were the challenges that the society itself met. That is, globalization, seen as a threat not an opportunity. The president of “Pierre and Marie Curie” referred to the second challenge in the digital revolution seen as a profound transformation of all activities and processes through the overwhelming volume of internet information. Despite the digitalization era, the society and the Higher Education implicitly faces the difficulty of having an informed public. Given these

circumstances, universities meet new demands in the high enrolment in the worldwide HE, greater variety of student population as well as the need for greater choice of education.

Whether Jean Chambaz speaks about challenges mostly, Sarah Linch proposed an EU renewed agenda for HE in the context of Eurydice Report on Citizenship Education in 2017. The renewed agenda regarded excellence in skills development, inclusive, connected systems, higher education and innovation, more effective HE systems.

The remedies that Jean Chambaz proposed referred to the immediate actions for the universities in that they should train the students to be agile and efficient in the knowledge society under the conditions of rapid jobs development requiring life-long learning.

On the contrary, Sarah Linch discussed the continuing of the professional development. She suggested that in the hands of Higher Education institutions there are few large-scale initiatives. She brought to the participants attention the fact that teaching itself was undervalued in that the junior and middle rank staff were required more teaching than to senior staff. She also signalled that research was valued more than teaching. On the other hand, the head of HE found some challenges and at the same time opportunities facing teaching and learning in point of technological innovation, the diversity in terms of age and background. Because of the digital area, more learning styles emerged in terms of shorter attention span, motivational issues and lack of receptiveness to “sage on the stage” teaching. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is more demand for new skills including the ability to learn on top of sector specific skills and knowledge and there is more need for the citizenship/ civic education of tertiary level.

Yet, both Jean Chambaz and Sarah Linch suggested concrete actions. Thus, Jean Chambaz spoke about the First European Forum on Learning and Teaching proposing four thematic peer groups in building links between researches and teaching undertakings, in empowering the students to prepare for their future as European professionals and citizens; the teachers should address to larger and more diverse students bodies. Above all, the Forum fostered engagement in the development of teaching and learning.

Sarah Linch’s concrete actions referred to ensuring flexibility in the curricula by enabling innovation, encouraging open learning and innovation ecosystems to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Moreover, evidence should be built about the characteristics of the students’ population. Incentives should be offered to the institutions to enhance teaching and learning as opposed to just research. Dialogue and knowledge sharing should be developed. Support for pedagogical skills development should be given; the high-quality innovative teaching should be rewarded. The students’ trends should be aligned with human resource management in Higher Education Institutions.

Yet, Jean Chambaz suggested recommendation to all responsible elements in the process of L&T. To the students, he recommended to learn how to learn, to be engaged in continuous learning and ongoing adjustment. The students should be able to develop critical thinking and sort from the huge amount of information. They should acquire the skills and competences necessary to the future citizen. The students should increase their international experience in order to adjust to the larger world.

Jean Chambaz’s recommendations for the HE institutions included building a culture on L&T. The HE institutions should learn to teach the students how to learn. The institutions should incorporate the wide range of tools and approaches to education and more customized ways of learning. The institutions should ensure orientation services from day one to graduation. They should also favour and acknowledge the investment of staff in L&T activities.

For the national governments Jean Chambaz recommended to ease the regulation to reinforce the academic and staff autonomy. The governments should promote university driven initiatives and they should allow experimentation.

The recommendations for both the national governments and EU referred to acknowledging the contribution of L&T to the current challenges. They, both, should develop policies and measures to support L&T. They should provide funds for sustaining experimentation. A continuous dialogue should exist among the thematic groups to identify the best practices (in this sense, a new L&T forum planned for 2019), to provide informed recommendations to the policy makers and stakeholders to a new stage of the Bologna process.

Sarah Linch's concrete actions comprised four directions. 1. What should people study – graduate tracking, EU coalition. 2. Effective teaching – Erasmus+ staff mobility and pedagogical training projects. 3. Well-designed curricula – work placement and support for digitalization. 4. Work with OECD – review of HE resources and teaching creativity and critical thinking.

### **III. Active Learning – a Possibility to Enhance the Students' Commitment in the Learning Process**

The 1st European Forum on Teaching and Learning taking place on 28-29 September 2017, organised by EUA in collaboration with La Conférence des Présidents d'université and hosted by Université Pierre ET Marie Curie, Paris, France gave some responses and solutions. As a member state of the European Union, Romania was represented by University of Bucharest.

Thus, the approach learning and teaching was in the forefront of the Forum in a globalized era jeopardized by the bulk of information and digital revolution. In the same line, the forum also sets some challenges for the students.

It is true that teachers should apply these steps in point of students. Nonetheless, it is we, teachers who should help the students how to learn. The most suitable environment is co-learning – linking research and teaching. Moreover, proper regulations should be adopted for the universities to be assessed as hubs of research teaching. Until concerted efforts are applied, the same discrepancies among universities will exist. Until new programmes, adapted to the labour market, the gap among universities will be larger and larger.

No doubt, co-learning is an important aspect of the higher education, to be applied very quickly in this globalized highly digitalized world if we want our universities to survive and by offering interesting programmes and specializations to the students.

The question arising clearly, is the ministry prepared to assess the universities within the approach of linking teaching and research on the one hand and on the other of new programmes and specializations to train the young generation for their working life?

We talk about professional life and civic engagement. What about the happiness of the individual, which is the most important, coordinate of the human life speaking about both career and personal development.

Fostering engagement in the development of learning and teaching is also an essential aspect. Are the ministerial bodies to assess this aspect? Are we prepared to talk about these all-important questions as equal partners at the round table with Finland, which cherish the happiness of their people, or Poland, a highly developed country?

Speaking of the European Forum, there are countries, which found solutions, and there were countries that made complaints. In the first category, Finland and Austria discussed through their representative "Strategic anchoring of learning and teaching development". Finland talked about leadership different from management in that leaders create visions while managers create goals or leaders grow personally, managers rely on existing, proven skills (www.forbes.com, William Arruda contributor, "9 Differences between Being a Leader and a Manager", 15 November, 2016). Finland's conclusion was that implementing learning and teaching strategy referred to changing management. The following conclusion was

enlightening “change is disturbing when it is done to us, exhilarating when it is done by us”, Rosabeth Moss Kanter.

In the same category, Poland and France discussed “Recognizing, fostering and celebrating teaching enhancement.” Poland came with concrete solutions. The Polish representative proposed 1. Annual teaching day/ festival of teaching 2a. Programme lab 2b. Future workshop 3. Teaching excellence awards.

In the other category and while Austria, Finland, France and Poland proposed solutions, Italy and Romania complained about 1. Lack of participation and engagement of students. Commentary. However, do all the teachers really engage in the learning process? 2. Lack of time and motivation for the academic staff. Commentary. Under these circumstance, how engaged can be the educators? 3. Lack of student self-awareness and self-reflection skills. Commentary. Can the educators cultivate self-awareness and self-reflective skills if they are demotivated themselves?

A possibility to enhance both the students’ commitment and the teacher motivation to go on what they have begun is the active learning. Mick Healey et. al [1] finds appropriate to call the teachers’ demotivation in the students’ lack of commitment in the process of learning, “Cri de Coeur”. Discussing the concept of active learning, the author puts it, quoting other authors (Bryson et al.) dealing with the subject matter that the concept of active learning encompasses perceptions, expectations and experiences of existing as a student and concomitantly building the ides of being a student.

According to the study mentioned above, the student is the hub of the curricular activities. Therefore, the curriculum, as the imaginative design, should encourage and engage the creativity of the students, while the engagement should test the effective curriculum. In other words, active learning is seen as the key for student engagement. Why? Because “Learning is not a spectator sport” (Chickering & Gamson: 1987, quoted by Healey, p.2).

Because students will not learn just sitting in their desks and listening to the teacher, memorizing and answering questions. Instead, they must talk about what they learn, write about what they learn and apply what they learn. Consequently, the students should learn from experience by linking *to do* with *to think*. Accordingly, the most effective way to link *to do* with *to think* is **inquiry based learning**. **Inquiry based learning** may take place in the field, in the studio, in the laboratory or in the classroom, doing research using real sites. Therefore, in the context of my study domain, Literature, the best means is the classroom inquiry based on real sites.

Yet, in order to include high impact activities within the learning and teaching process, to encompass these high impact activities in in curricula is vital. Because the overall idea behind active learning and students’ engagement is experiential learning. The learning becomes the vehicle whereby the knowledge is obtained by transformation of the experience [Kolb quoted by Healey, p.3]. Where the nature of learning has four stages: experiencing, reflecting, generalising and testing.

Moreover, it is the duty of the teacher to design his teaching by taking into consideration the students’ background and needs. The teacher’s role is to attend the process of learning, “teaching for understanding approach”. Therefore, linking knowing and doing may be a possibility to enhance teaching-learning process, because it supports and understands how theoretical mastery is achieved through active learning.

Accordingly, in order to achieve the students’ success in the current conditions of globalization, digitalization and profound changes in the workplace and in line with the recommendations of the First Forum on Teaching & Learning, a change in the teaching methods is necessary. Because, we, teachers must do everything in our power in order to obtain the students’ engagement in the learning process, their success as future citizens and professional, ultimately.

Nonetheless, exponents of the active learning already exists in both “Constantin Brancusi” and “Babes Bolyai” Universities. Thus, in “Constantin Brancusi” University, during the English Literature, *Old English Literature, Seventeenth Century and Restoration, Romanticism or Irish Literature* the students have the opportunity to access real sites like the prestigious *Norton Anthology of English Literature*<sup>1</sup>. The students have to access the site and solve an inquiry. By solving this inquiry, the students are in the position to do research by their own and find out the cultural and historical characteristics of the studied period, as well as the features of the writers of the period.

Another example of active learning and linking doing with knowing is the School of Application founded in the same university. The aim of the School of Application is to prepare the students – future teachers – to better absorb teaching methods and working with students.

The example in “Babes Bolyai” University refer to the Faculty of Business, Business Administration specialization. Thus, the students in this specialization have the opportunity to link to do with to know by doing research on real sites. For example, during the course of *Corporate Finance*, the students are in the situation to examine *Bursa de Valori Bucuresti* directly and analyse the situation of the transactions.

Also an exponent of the Active Learning, during the *Human Resources* and *Leadership* courses the students have to access *Harvard Business Review* to do research. The aim is to explore genuine articles on the hot issues in Business Administration.

#### IV. The Teacher as a Leader

However, to operate a change in the teaching methods, a strong leader is necessary. The strong leader of exceptional skills has the task to transform and improve schools, especially Higher Education Institutions. Higher Education is the ultimate schooling degree. The Higher Education Institutions train the students to become the future professionals in all the domains, teachers, medical doctors, engineers, politicians etc.

The concept the teacher as a leader is as old as 1986 [Nappi, p.2]. The teacher as a leader can model teaching methods for other teachers. The teachers as leaders are in the position to decide upon the teaching and learning processes. By extending the role of the teacher-leader outside the classroom, they may be influencers for other teachers, as well.

The teachers as leaders can share their expertise in many roles. The teacher as leader possesses a set of skills [idem]. The influence of the teacher as leader teaching students goes beyond classroom. Thus, the teacher leader may be resource provider, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, mentor, school leader, data coach, and catalyst for change or learner himself.

Yet, what is a leader? A leader, according to Manuel Dicu [p.56], who quotes Abraham Zaleznik [1977, *Managers and Leaders*], the essential elements of the leader are inspiration, vision and human passion, which represent the key elements to ensure the success of an organization. Abraham Zaleznik quoted by Manuel Dicu, also claims that the organization itself is a system with its own order based on tradition. Tradition is preferred to

---

<sup>1</sup> A Web Companion to

The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 8 th Edition

Explore English literature and culture with Norton Topics Online. Instructors may access the 8e Course Guide.

You must register for the Norton Instructor's Resource Library and request a password in order to access the Guide.

Prepared by the Norton Anthology editors, this extensive, freely accessible Web resource for The Norton Anthology of English Literature offers twenty-seven topics for study and discussion.

<https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/welcome.htm>

new risks. Unfortunately, this is the case in the government and education favouring the bureaucratic culture.

Therefore, the leader is the one who instead of impersonal, passive manner trying to answer the needs of the society, models the needs of the society in that of making use of what he already has. The leader finds new approaches of older issues. This is the case of the teachers, leaders in their classrooms. Teachers are in possession of a wide experience and the necessary competences, consisting thus, the intellectual capital of the education organization [Nappi, p.4, quoting Belasco and Stayer, 1993].

## V. Conclusions

The Higher Education Institutions, no matter how small or large, really face some challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this sense, the First Forum on Teaching and Learning examined this issue thoroughly. Not only the Forum did examine the issue, but the participants in the Forum in Paris found some solutions among which I can remind some like, for instance, training the students to be agile and efficient in the knowledge society given the rapid change in the structure of jobs. Because of the era of digitalization and since there are more learning styles, a viable solution is achieving new skills by the teachers and continuously improving their teaching methods.

In our paper, we suggest such a change concerning teaching methods, namely, the Active Learning which emerged as early as 1987. The Active Learning is, thus the solution we embrace in order to enhance the students' commitment in the processes of teaching and learning. Nonetheless, the teacher as a leader in his classroom can cope with the issue of making the students more aware on what they learn and how they can make use of the acquired knowledge. We also provide examples of already utilising Active Learning in the classroom. In other words, Active Learning method may be the solution to enhance the students' commitment in the processes of Teaching & Learning.

## VI. Bibliography:

1. Mick Healey - Editor, Eric Pawson - Editor, Michael Solem – Editor, *Active Learning and Student Engagement: International Perspectives and Practices in Geography in Higher Education*, London. 2010. [www.questia.com](http://www.questia.com), retrieved 19.06.2017
2. Nappi, Judith S., Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin, *The Teacher Leader: Improving Schools By Building Social Capital Through Shared Leadership*, V. 80. Issue 4 Publication date: Summer 2014. 29pp Provided by ProQuest LLC., [www.questia.com](http://www.questia.com) retrieved 8.05.2018
3. Manuel Dicu, *Barometru de Leadership - Profil de Leader al Secolului XXI – Sorin Iftode*, publicat in ECOSTUDENT, Revista de cercetare Stiintifica a Studentilor Economisti, Nr. 7/2016, pp. 56-61, [http://www.utgjiu.ro/ecostudent/ecostudent/pdf/2016-07/10\\_Dicu%20Manuel.pdf](http://www.utgjiu.ro/ecostudent/ecostudent/pdf/2016-07/10_Dicu%20Manuel.pdf)
4. <http://www.eua.be/activities-services/events/event/2017/09/28/default-calendar/european-learning-teaching-forum>
5. <http://cfe.unc.edu/files/2014/08/FYC2.pdf>
6. [https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/9/97/Citizenship\\_Study\\_EN\\_2017.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/9/97/Citizenship_Study_EN_2017.pdf)
7. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/03/25/rome-declaration/>